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The poetics of anti-Americanism in Greece: rhetoric, agency and local meaning

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Abstract: In this article, we examine the content and rationale of anti-Americanism in Greece, drawing ethnographic information from two urban centres, Patras and Volos. We pay special attention to the conspiracy prone attributes of Greek anti-American rhetoric, and, instead of simply dismissing it, or seeing it primarily as a manifestation of nationalist thinking, we attempt to unpack the threads of meaning that make it so appealing in local contexts. We look in particular at the aetiology of blame within this particular discourse and try to explain the specific readings of history and politics that make it significant in local contexts. We argue that Greek anti-Americanism has an empowering potential for local actors, as it provides them with a certain degree of discursive agency over wider political processes that are beyond their immediate control.

Keywords: Local rhetoric, perceptions of power, conspiracy, anti-Americanism, Greece.

Introduction

The citizens of Greece often engage in passionate debate about international politics and the role of the Great Powers in the greater scheme of events in history. In these conversations, the United States of America is the prime suspect for all kinds of injustice and malfunction in the world system: it is blamed for abusing its power, intervening unilaterally in the domestic affairs of other sovereign states, and also, for having harmed, among other small nations, Greece. Local actors in Greece have been noted for their skill in articulating arguments that blame the great powers as agents of disaster (Herzfeld 1982, 1992). They have been also noted for their skill in interpreting contemporary events in terms of familiar historical patterns (Sutton 1998) and for the analytical, pointed and irony-prone disposition of those interpretations (Brown & Theodossopoulos 2000, 2003; Kirtsoglou 2006). All these characteristics have been apparent in the Greek version of anti-American discourse, which, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, has acquired an increasingly central stage in Greek local level conversations about the aetiology of political events.

In this article we explore some of the most central themes of anti-Americanism in Greece and try to shed some light on its rhetorical complexity. Paul Hollander (2005), a major theorist of anti-Americanism perceives two distinct directions in anti-American rhetoric. The first represents ‘a direct and rational response to the evident misdeeds of the United States abroad and its shortcomings and inequalities at home’, while the second emerges as ‘a largely groundless, irrational predisposition (similar to racism, sexism or anti-Semitism), an expression of deeply rooted scapegoating impulse, a disposition more closely related to the problems, frustrations, and

deficiencies of those entertaining and articulating it' (2005: 13, 15). We are unhappy with Hollander's second view of anti-Americanism, which we feel does not do justice to the complexity and intricate meaningfulness of informal political commentary at the local level.

Instead of treating anti-American discourse as a pathology, we prefer an approach that regards anti-Americanism as an ideology explaining 'why the world is how it is' and putting forward 'a justification for future action' (McPherson 2006: 1). We maintain that by acknowledging the exegetic potential of anti-Americanism we can better understand its appeal among disenfranchised local actors situated in the periphery of global power. Anti-Americanism may be laden with stereotypes, and often relies on deeply nationalist readings of history and political causality. The Greek variation, for example, evidently reproduces nationalist and irredentist claims (Stefanidis 2007). Yet, instead of dismissing this discourse hastily as primarily an expression of nationalist thinking, we prefer to examine its complexity, the historical events that inspire it, and its versatility as an explanatory tool.

Anti-Americanist rhetoric, as in the case of conspiracy theory, is built upon culturally meaningful values and points of views, it has an underlying logic hidden within its apparent contradictions (Marcus 1999; Sanders & West 2003). We argue that anti-American discourse has also an empowering dimension as it provides peripheral actors with a certain degree of discursive agency. The anti-American critique at the local level can provide disempowered local critics with the comfort of being able to discuss greater processes that lie beyond their direct control, and in many cases it can have an emancipatory ideological potential.

In this article we trace Greek renderings of anti-Americanism as these are discussed in informal contexts in two urban centres, Patras and Volos, the sites of our ongoing fieldwork investigating Greek political life.¹ In the sections that follow we first pay some close attention on how our respondents evaluate the United States and its citizens. Then, having described in detail the content and basic characteristics of local Greek perceptions of the US, we proceed to an analysis of the greater socio-political context that makes these views relevant. We also examine how our respondents discuss the local notions of 'American' ignorance and 'American' arrogance in their rhetorical arguments, and the tactics of blame attribution that emerge from the strategic deployment of these notions. Finally, we focus on the expectations of our respondents towards the US and the Western Great Powers, which remain unfulfilled, since our respondents believe that the West has not paid off its (perceived) historic debt to Greece. We argue that culturally meaningful ideas like these can help us fully appreciate the particular angle of Anti-Americanism in Greece and its appeal as a dynamic and popular discourse.

Talking about 'Americans' and 'America'

A fundamental distinction in our respondents discourse about the United States involves subtle distinctions about the government, its official agents, and its ordinary citizens. United States, the nation, is most frequently referred to in everyday

conversation as ‘America’ (*i Ameriki*) and its official representatives, politicians, military and secret agents, as ‘the Americans’ (*oi Amerikanoi*). In fact in most conversations, the generalising category ‘Americans’ is at first instance reserved for the agents of the state, who are normally discussed as critically, and in as much an unenthusiastic manner, as the State itself. But a second kind of ‘Americans’ may potentially emerge in a conversation, one that refers to the ordinary citizens of the State, the everyday people. Here the evaluations of our respondents are more complex and nuanced, and can be potentially both negative and positive. Here are two examples:

I have lived in America and I have seen their positive sides (*ta kala tous*)! They are smiling people, willing to be of service. Unlike me, my cousin who was a communist, hated them, until he spent some time in their country. He changed his opinion and now spends half the year in America. But he is still a communist. (A 53 year-old man, a lawyer)

I do not like the arrogance of powerful states, but the Americans themselves are practical people, who try to better themselves. Some go after profit, but others serve the arts and the sciences. (A 45 year-old woman, a civil servant)

In those cases that our respondents in Patras and Volos were prepared to comment about the ‘American’ people in less generalising terms, they stressed the heterogeneity of the US population, its multiethnic origin, and the recent history of that nation (which they contrasted with Greece’s presumed ethnic homogeneity and ‘very long’ history).² ‘They are a mosaic of civilisations’ (*ena mosaiko politismon*), our respondents underlined, ‘they have Christian fundamentalists and atheists’, ‘many uneducated people’—that is, ‘the crowd which is controlled (*katythinomeno*) by the politicians’—and others who are ‘intellectuals and artists’. The latter can be ‘intelligent’ (*efyeis*) and ‘pioneers’ (*protoporoi*) our respondents acknowledged, unlike the great majority of the population who are seen as ‘good-hearted’ (*kalokardoï*), but gullible or naive (*afeleis*). Even committed communists with strong anti-American views recognized, in the course of conversation, some humanising complexity among the range of United States’ population:

They have their good and bad sides (*ta kala tous kai ta kaka tous*). They do well in science, in art, in music; but their politicians are corrupted. Many people in America go daft over (*apovlakonontai*) from their own system, they do not know much about the dirty politics of their own government.

Despite its condescending connotations, the stereotype of the ‘naïve American’, which emerged in several conversations in Patras and Volos, was often put into use to relieve the everyday citizens of United States from some of the blame usually reserved for the policies of their government. Our Greek respondents, experts in rationalising responsibility (Herzfeld 1993), sustain very subtle distinctions in the aetiology of blame, and can empathetically apply their own familiar blame-evading tactics in their evaluations of others. We must not lose perspective, however, of the patronising dimensions of this rhetorical strategy. A certain degree of occasional, political leniency towards the ordinary Americans—who are perceived as unaware of the political reality—represents a more widespread denigrating attitude. ‘They are

‘clueless’ (*adaeis*), our respondents maintain, ‘they are slap-happy’ (*xazoharoumenoi*), ‘they live permanently in the darkness’ (*zoun monima sto skotadi*), having been brought up in such a way that ‘they don’t recognise what is happening (*den xeroun ti pezetai*) in the world’.

In most comparisons of that kind the citizens of the world’s most powerful state are portrayed as unaware of the world itself, an evaluation that can inspire satirical comments and jokes that aim towards subverting political power, while at the same time encourage a favourable comparison with the powerless, but politically astute European-or-Mediterranean-or-Greek interlocutors of the given conversation. Seen from this point of view, the ‘Americans’ might be the citizens of a powerful nation, but they are, in many respects, and especially in terms of their political awareness, lesser than the peripheral actors of less-privileged nations. ‘Out of touch’ with and ‘apathetic’ about what is happening in the world, they are easily ‘misled’ (*paraplanounte*) by their ‘unscrupulous’ (*adistaktoi*) politicians. For many modern Greeks, as Kirtsoglou (2006) has argued in her work on local views on terrorism, it is commonly assumed that the ordinary citizens of a given nation share some responsibility for the political choices of their government and, therefore it is considered fair if they are judged accordingly:

I don’t have a fixed opinion about the Americans, but in the last years, my opinion has changed. It all depends on their actions in the world; the everyday Americans are good people, but their politics are threatening to the interests of Greece, and those of the smaller nations on earth. (A sixty-year old man, an accountant)

The generalised ‘Americans’ in the discourse of our respondents are a fluid category of blame, and the degree of that blame is constantly re-evaluated in local conversation. In most cases, timely developments in the arena of international politics provide opportunities for sharp commentary, and inspire new arguments and comparisons, or used as evidence to validate previous conclusions. The division of Yugoslavia (Sutton 1998), the Western military intervention in the same country (Brown & Theodossopoulos 2000), the September 11 (Kirtsoglou 2006), as well as more recent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos n.d.) have all provided opportunities to assess the role of United States in international politics with respect to more contextual parameters, but also in generalising terms.

We have observed three more encompassing and re-curing critical predispositions that transpire out of such conversations, and are used to criticize the people our respondents call ‘the Americans’. These involve (i) a perception of US arrogance (seen as emanating from US’s incontestable power), (ii) a critique of the interfering attitude of US in the local affairs of other nations, and (iii) a belief that US politics follow an anti-Greek orientation. These three critical directions merge and support each other in particular conversations, and provide inspiration for numerous derivative arguments.

For example, and as several of our respondents volunteered to explain, the ‘big-headedness’ of ‘the Americans’, encourages them to see other people as ‘second-rate’ (*parakatianous*), ‘as little ants that they can step on’. In other words, ‘the Americans’

believe that they are 'superior' and 'treat others as third-world people'. This is a symptom of their 'arrogance' (*eparsi*), our respondents further explain, which '*they*' subsequently demonstrate towards other, 'smaller nations' (*stous mikroterous laous*). According to this explanation, arrogance is the result of having and being able to exercise power, and the 'Americans', like other powerful nations before them, 'have fallen in the trap of power'.

'The Americans have the power', many respondents in Patras and Volos underlined, 'and they are putting it into use' (*tin hrisimopioun*): they are intervening in other peoples' lives'. The politics and moral justification of 'intervention' seriously concerned many of our interlocutors, who criticised the assumption that the 'Americans' can be the 'guardians' (*kidemones*) of 'other nations' (*allon laon*) and exercise an authority to interfere for the sake of maintaining the peace. A 45 year-old woman, married and with four children, made clear this concern as follows:

They think that they can be the rulers of the world. They are the rulers, of course, but the issue is that they take advantage of it, in a very deceitful manner (*ypoulo tropo*). For example, they talk about peace, but these are excuses to intervene.

Some other informants clarified that the problem is not that the 'Americans' interfere, but that they get involved in ways that do not always seem properly justified. Fairness, partiality and impartiality in this context are assessed according to criteria that are meaningful to the local interlocutors that participate in a given discussion. So, while it is said that the 'American injustices' (*oi adikies ton Amerikanon*) are many, the examples that matter the most concern American intervention in Greek politics. Other cases of US intervention are often used as corroborating evidence for highlighting this greater feeling of 'injustice', which often has a more local reference.

As we will further discuss in the following sections, US interference in Greece occurred mainly in the period following the Second World War, and our respondents are able to introduce particular examples in any given conversation, which often relate to events that they have experienced themselves. In their great majority, these 'American' interferences are judged to be harmful to the interests and sovereignty of the Greek nation state. 'They have taken advantage of us', our respondents explained, 'history has shown how they act against us in a devious manner'.

Some of our respondents treated those observations as indisputable, and felt no need to further rationalize their opinion: 'the Americans are imperialists', they argued in an emphatic manner, 'American politics always harm Greece'. Some others, however, were ready to qualify their (otherwise) critical observations by offering more precise evaluations: 'the Americans have done harm', they stressed, '*but*' this is true 'in most cases' or 'in different degrees'. In some cases, they further clarified, 'they' have harmed the interests of Greece 'indirectly', for example, 'by helping the enemies of Greece'.

To a certain degree, these small discrepancies in the accusatory tone of our respondents are influenced by political preferences and affiliations. Most of our respondents themselves will agree with the proposition that anti-Americanism in

Greece has a history which is directly or indirectly associated with the political left. But they also acknowledge that nowadays anti-Americanism in Greece is more widespread than ever, with a popular appeal among supporters of all political parties. 'Anti-Americanism is not a left or right political choice, but a national one', a 40 year-old saleswoman explained, while a 35 year-old man, a computer technician, added, in a similar, but slightly more rhetorical tone, 'Anti-Americanism in Greece is not a left or right direction; it is a human reaction... Everybody can see the game of the Americans'.

Seen from this point of view, a critical predisposition towards the United States and its politics is not directly, and not always, related to party politics and commitment to already circumscribed ideological predilections. Some of our most dispassionate and cool-headed respondents describe anti-Americanism as 'the latest fashion', or a rhetoric that the non-leftists have borrowed from the leftists, appropriating its populist potential. A few respondents, and among them some of a leftist persuasion, attributed extreme anti-Americanism to the extreme right, an attitude which they compared to the more systematically articulated anti-Americanism of the left; 'the extreme right is far worst' they explained, that is, 'they are even more anti-American', and 'for the wrong reasons'.

Finally, reflecting upon the degree and magnitude of the growing anti-American attitudes in Greece, our respondents in Patras and Volos made their own self-evaluation. Greece is definitely an anti-American nation they admitted, but the Greeks are not necessarily more anti-American than many other people (*apo tous allous laous*). Maybe they are, we were told, more critical towards the 'Americans' than other Europeans, but there are 'other nations that hate the Americans more than the Greeks', while we should not forget, as two or three informants suggested, 'that there are many Greeks who live in America'.

'I think we are more normal anti-Americanists than other anti-Americanists', said a 25 year-old music instructor, reflecting upon what for him is a familiar and culturally meaningful type of anti-Americanism. We will present some of its historically constituted rational in the section that follows. For now we conclude with the words of a 50 year-old primary school teacher, a woman with of a progressive, but not explicitly leftist political orientation:

the Greeks criticise the Americans all the time, but most imitate the American way of life, in many respects, and without discretion (*diakrisi*); they pretend to be anti-American to show of, to appear cultured and different (*gia figura, gia kouloura, gia diaforetitikotita*), but all this is pretentious (*ola auta omos einai dithen*).

The West and its debt

Anti-Americanism—or the existence of anti-American discourses—is certainly not an exclusively Greek phenomenon. The political legacy of the cold war and recent developments related to the 'war on terrorism' have led people from all around the world to question the sincerity of US policies (cf. Kirtsoglou 2006; Kirtsoglou nd.;

Marcus 1999). In an attempt to explain anti-Americanism, Said argues that such a political stance is the result of 'a series of historical interventions and inhuman policies coldly exercised by the US' (2001: 45), while Spiro refers to various types of anti-Americanism found in Europe in order to conclude that Anti-Americanism consists not of opposition to particular policies but of 'persistent patterns of gross criticism of the main values of the U.S. Constitution' (1988: 497). The question of whether or not Greek anti-Americanism is political (originating from opposition to specific policies) rather than cultural (inspired by an opposition to North American cultural values in general), as Veremis (2003) would argue, has not, we feel, a clear-cut answer. The historical contextualisation of Greek anti-US feelings supports both possibilities. This is why it will be necessary to examine carefully both the history of the *relations* between Greece and the Western Powers and the history of Greece *itself* (in socio-cultural terms) in order to do justice to the spectrum of the various and sometimes conflicting views of our informants.

As we have already mentioned, in the period following the Second World War anti-Western attitudes in Greece were rather limited to the political Left (see also Stefanidis 2007: 169). The bitter civil war that broke in the country in 1945 ended in favour of the government forces, which were crucially empowered by British and American aid (Clogg 1992: 141-142). The British forces led by general Skoby suspended the communist military control of Athens in 1944, and the US (following the 1947 Truman Doctrine) consistently prevented Greece from falling under the Soviet influence (cf. Stefanidis 2007: 169). The Marshall plan evoked of course the sympathy of the Greek people who—despite the fact that the Left was no insignificant part of the Greek society—had ultimately committed themselves to the West (cf. Clogg 1992: 179, 181; Argyrou 2002: 100-1; Kirtsoglou 2006).³

One dimension of explaining the catholic Greek anti-americanism of today is thus related to an account of how the deep-seated belief that 'Greece belongs to the West' gave gradually its place to the conviction that Greece is an homage of the Western powers. The strategic position of Greece in the cold war years constituted foreign intervention, 'not an exception but a consistent pattern in Greece's relationship with the West' (Sutton 2003: 197; cf. Nachami 1990; Samatas 1986: 15; Papadopoulos 1989: 49; Clogg 1992: 146-171). The American aid in the fifties was accompanied by a certain degree of political control that in the consciousness of the general public culminated in the alleged support offered by the US government and the NATO allies to the military Junta, which established itself in Greece in April 1967. A careful historical appreciation of US-Greek relations from the 50s onwards reveals however that while in certain occasions US interference can be documented, in some others it cannot (cf. Glogg 1992: 147, 155). The US government (led by president Kissinger) did nothing more than non-condemning the Greek military regime of 1967-1974, while, as Stefanidis (2007) pointedly observes from 1953 onwards, Greek political forces were often inviting themselves foreign intervention.

Stefanidis (2007) is certainly right to claim that American omnipotence is a myth. The US is certainly not the puppeteer of *all* Greek political developments post 1945. The image of American all-powerfulness 'despite the fact that it contains elements of

truth, more often than not it operates in an oversimplifying manner as an alibi for actions and omissions of political agents inside Greece' (Stefanidis 2006¹). Anti-Americanism in Greece has been consistently put into use and reinforced by parties and individuals for reasons of political convenience (cf. Kirtsoglou 2006). It could be argued—and we will return to this claim later on—that discourses which blame the US for almost all ailments of Greek contemporary history can be partly explained as 'narratives of opposition' (cf. Stewart and Strathern 2002) that detract attention from all kinds of internal failures and weaknesses (Clogg 1992, Herzfeld 1993). Greek politicians across the political spectrum have systematically transferred their own responsibilities and failures onto dark external forces, while simultaneously took advantage of international crises to create internal polarisation and safeguard their political survival (see Clogg 1992: 182; Kirtsoglou 2006: 70).

At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge that in the cold-war period, the US benefited from political developments in Greece, including the military regime of the 1967-1974 (see Stefanidis 2007: 176) and clearly prioritised political control over concerns about democracy, civil rights, transparency and equality. Greek attitudes towards the US and the Western Powers in general can therefore be adequately, and without much predilection, be seen as having been moulded by the wider political environment of the cold war era, which has undeniably shaped contemporary Greek historical consciousness (cf. Herzfeld 1992). 'America'—as our informants like to call the US—has been indeed the hegemonic power that up to a degree steered local and international history (cf. Clogg, 1992: 150-171; Sutton 2003: 201; Brown & Theodossopoulos 2003: 321-322) and kept reminding Greece, often in painful ways, of its 'relative lack of power and the realities of colonial and post-colonial world politics' (Sutton 2003: 197).

Considering that in the period after the Second World War anti- or pro- Americanism was mostly a matter of left or right wing affiliation respectively, it is worth turning our attention to what is seen by both scholars and local level actors as the turning point for the relations between Greece and the US: the failure of the US and the Western Powers in general to support Greece and Cyprus since 1954. In order to concisely account for the events between 1954 and 1974 in an analytically rich manner, we will explore and follow at first instance Stefanidis's compelling argument that Greek anti-Americanism relates in fact to irredentism and nationalism. Without totally rejecting this claim however, we will subsequently try to enrich the analysis by maintaining that nationalism and irredentism need themselves to be explained and contextualised before they can compose sufficient explanations for other attitudes.

Bringing ample evidence into his analysis, Stefanidis manages to show that the US attitude towards Greek politics in general and the demand of unification with Cyprus in particular, 'collided with the irredentist core of Greek political culture', thus engendering 'a surge of Anti-Americanism that proved nearly impossible to quell' (2007: 190). Indeed the US refusal to support the unification of Cyprus with Greece, and later to prevent, or reverse the effects of Turkish military intervention on that island alienated to a great extent the Greek public and obliterated dividing lines

¹ Extract of an interview in the Greek newspaper '*ta Nea*' (our translation)

between right and left. Stefanidis is providing us with one of the most eloquent instances of expression of the Greek feelings at the time by Psathas, a regular columnist in the newspaper '*ta Nea*'. Reflecting upon the tension of the 1964 period and the bombarding of the area of Tilliria in Cyprus by Turkish planes Psathas comments that "the soul of every Greek revolted... inside this iron ring of hostility and cynicism where Greece found herself ensnared by her 'great allies' (Stefanidis 2007: 233). Psathas regrets the fact that Greece has ever subscribed in the 'deceitful principles of NATO' and comments: 'the attack had come not from the north,⁴ but from the barbarians from the East who harbour an age old hatred against us' (ibid.).

The perception of the Greek and the Greek Cypriot side of what was right and justified was indeed guided by irredentist considerations and a firmly established belief that the West owes to Greece (and Cyprus as part of the Greek culture), not only a 'repayment' for its allegiance during the two World Wars, but also—and perhaps more importantly—the very existence of Western culture, practically and symbolically. Symbolically, because classical Greece is seen according to this line of thinking as the 'cradle of Western civilisation' (*likno tou Dytikou politismou*), and practically because the Greeks perceive themselves as having always played the role of the levee against the 'barbarians' who came at various points in time from the East.⁵ In turn, in Greek consciousness Western betrayal is also a recurrent phenomenon since the time of the crusades and the capture of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204.

Considering the above, Stefanidis (2007) is right in his reading of Greek anti-Americanism as a phenomenon that originates in irredentism and in nationalism. Yet, we have good reason to point towards some additional complexity: present-day history is read by the Greek public in terms of past history; it is dynamically interpreted and re-interpreted in a never-ending interplay of narratives that feed on each other and solidify identities, attitudes, feelings and processes of political causality (see Sutton 1998).⁶ For this reason it is important to examine carefully the context and content of nationalism as well as other possible sources of inspiration of anti-American discourses. In the section that follows, we will attempt a re-consideration of Greek anti-Americanism in terms of a search for local meaning and what we call an expectation for 'political consistency'.

When the West does not keep its side of the bargain

In an article that explores anti-Americanism in Turkey Bilge Criss explains how the US stance on the Cyprus issue has alienated the Turkish public, posing questions of allegiance to NATO and raising issues concerning national Turkish sovereignty (2002: 475). For the puzzled unsuspecting reader—who might expect that if Greece is dissatisfied with the US stance in a Greco-Turkish dispute, then Turkey should be satisfied—we need to explain why these two different countries had the same expectation: namely, that the US had (and ought to have) the role of the defender of

international justice. Stefanidis explains this as being partly related to local (Greek) opinion makers and partly to the American rhetoric and propaganda (2007: 190). The introduction of Turkey adds of course an awkward complication to the first part of this argument. If it is Greek opinion makers who are responsible for the perception of the US as an international ‘trustee’ of peace, democracy and political justice then we need to assume that Turkish opinion makers followed a similar strategy and of course we then need to explain the similarity.

At this point it is easier I think if we rely more on Stefanidis’s second reason, namely the American rhetoric itself. Considering the US role in international politics during the cold war and after, we believe that we can safely point to the presence of an hegemonic global empire that exports and imposes ideologies and policies alike in various parts of the world (Stewart Harawira 2005; Kirtsoglou n.d.). It is not just the local actor’s perception that the US is the regulator (up to a certain extent) of international developments. The US presents itself as such, claims this role for itself, and has acted upon it, often entirely unilaterally and on more than one occasion.

Undeniably local politicians transfer responsibilities to ‘external’ forces. Andreas Papandreou, one of the greatest political figures in post-second world war Greece and prime minister of the country for nearly 20 years has used anti-Americanism in a rather populist and reactionary manner and as a panacea for nearly every internal problem in Greece (cf. Veremis 2003). Papandreou was among the first people⁷ who publicly spoke of Greece as a satellite country to the Western powers and compared the relations between Greece and the US to those of Czechoslovakia and the USSR (Couloumbis 1974). Papandreou’s anti-Americanist discourse marked more than one generation of Greek citizens, and cultivated an idiosyncratic type of Greek nationalism that is nowadays defended even by those who twenty years ago were his political rivals. It capitalised upon the populist notion that ‘Greece belongs to the Greeks’, a slogan that encapsulated popular dissatisfaction with NATO, the EU, the US and the Western Powers in general, in a country, which—paradoxically—was at the same time fighting hard to achieve accession in the EU, to gain US favouritism, and to acquire a strong role in NATO.

Greece committed itself to the West (partly by writing off a substantial part of its Leftist population who was exiled or lived as outlaws until 1974) in the hope that she would be an equal signatory in a group of nations that shared the same principles of democracy, fairness, transparency and national sovereignty. The Greek dissatisfaction with the US today stems, up to a great extent, from the realization that this hope might have just been wishful thinking. Given that the entire cold war politic was about an ultimate, collective and historical task that led the US and the Western Powers in General to systematically prioritise political ends over means, such feelings of dissatisfaction do not seem entirely unreasonable. The history of Greek-American relations, the history US’s relations with other countries, and the realpolitik since the Second World War in general, seriously question how self-evident the principles of the ‘Western civilisation’ (broadly speaking) are nowadays. In this context the Greek people feel certainly frustrated—to say the least—by the attitude of their ‘traditional

allies' who are regarded as having committed a kind of treason by not keeping their end of the bargain.

'In all its modern history', many of our respondents emphatically state, 'Greece has fought side by side with the Western Powers, but we have never gained anything in return'. The lack of support (or, what is seen as lack of support) to Greece in relation to Turkey, in the events in Cyprus, or in the more recent dispute about the naming of Macedonia, pose to our respondents a problem of political consistency. The US intervenes in Yugoslavia in favour of the Kossovars, but leaves Turkey untouched when it comes to the Kurds. US's traditional ally (Greece) is not supported adequately in the case of Cyprus. Turkey that did not fight on the side of the English and the Americans in the Second World War is perceived as having gained more than Greece in the post-Second World War history. The US recognises the use of the name of 'Macedonia' by a neighbouring state showing disrespect not only to what is seen by the overwhelming majority of Greeks as a part of an indisputable Greek history, but also, and more importantly, to the very cultural heritage of the West as a whole which is heavily based on the ideals of classical Greece.

Greek anti-Americanism and discontent with the Western Powers in general, cannot therefore be adequately explained outside indigenous perceptions of history and what constitutes, in the eyes of our respondents, political and historical consistency. In the section that follows, we conclude this article by demonstrating that anti-Americanism in Greece relates to historical expectations of what constitutes alliance and allegiance and ultimately, to the very need of the social actor to exercise political agency in a world that is governed by entities far greater and far more powerful than the Self.

Ignorance, Arrogance and Allegiance

A widely recognisable slang term for 'naïve' in colloquial Greek is '*amerikanaki*' (diminutive of 'American'). Our informants often boast that they are not '*amerikanakia*' (plural), they were not born yesterday, and they cannot be easily fooled 'like the American people'. The latter are in turn constructed in the local imagination as a nation living not merely in ignorance, but in a kind of staged reality manufactured by the media (like CNN) and sustained by American politicians who are mostly puppets of big corporations (or capitalism in general) and of the CIA. As we explained in the previous sections, the distinction between 'America' (as a nation) and 'the Americans' (as individual people) suggests some empathy towards everyday people imagined as the Self. This kind of empathy extends even to the people of powerful nations and is itself a kind of exegetical tool that serves to partly justify why the *realpolitik* proves to be so different from indigenous *perceptions* of justice. Imagining the Other as powerless (through ignorance this time) provides some justification for what our respondents see as lack of resistance to power, or failure to engage with injustice in world politics.

In everyday conversation, the above view is usually put forward with examples. A popular one refers to the strikes on Yugoslavia in 1999, which according to the prevailing sense of justice of many in Greece should have never happened (see Brown

& Theodossopoulos 2000, 2003). Nevertheless it did and the American public were not able to resist, since, our respondents argue, the ‘Americans’ were misled by politicians and the media on the particulars of the situation. The introduction here of an argument that highlights the ‘false political consciousness’ of the public in United States—apart from humanizing so to speak the target audience—also provides a means of never adequately questioning the Self’s perceptions of justice, historical causality and political fairness. According to this logic, if the Others do not act in a manner that appears to agree with the Self, this is not because every coin might have two sides, but because the Others simply don’t know the truth. Conspiracy scenarios do not then involve only Greece and the smaller nations. They can apply equally well to the US and its people thus accounting for all kinds of paradoxes and providing meaning, coherence and continuity in local discourse.

The existence of dark capitalist centres and the power of agencies like the CIA, is in turn a fine example of analogical thinking. An important feature of the Greek post-Second World War political scene was the existence of the *parakratos*, the semi-legal state apparatus, or the para-governmental network, or ‘parastate’ as Clogg (1992: 157) translates it (cf. Kirtsoglou 2006: 69). The *parakratos* has been associated with the most conservative forces within Greece and it was considered responsible for a number of events that eventually lead to the establishment of the 1967 dictatorship in Greece. Familiar historical patterns inspire Greek understanding of unfamiliar settings (Sutton 1998) and thus the CIA is imagined very much as the equivalent *parakratos* in the US that stirs American political life, exercising overt or covert control of local politicians.

In terms of the discourse described so far, ignorance is a strong exegetical tool. However, it is not always easily applicable, and it does not always relieve US citizens from their share of blame entirely. After all—in spite of their ignorance—they represent what is seen as the earth’s most powerful nation. The ‘Americans’ are therefore portrayed sometimes as being *en masse* responsible for the misdeeds of the nation. The idea of ‘collective responsibility’ (and in particular collective political responsibility) is tied to the concept of the nation as an imagined community engaged in ‘steady, anonymous and simultaneous activity’ (Anderson 1983: 31). The nation—very much conceptualised in terms of kinship (Sutton 1998)—is deemed collectively accountable for the actions of its representatives.⁸ In this respect, the US people share the arrogance of their leaders.

US arrogance is demonstrated (according to our respondents in Greece) through acts of intervention in the affairs of other smaller nations, unilateralism and systematic attempts towards polarisation of the international political community. While other nations in the world, such as Greece, have committed themselves to the West genuinely believing in the superiority of democracy and equality as ideals of political organisation, the US behaves as if it were an Empire. The resulting World Order is in effect, as our informants emphatically state alluding to the Roman Empire, a ‘*Pax Americana*’. Whereas consensus is the ultimate criterion of legitimacy in modern Western societies (Scrutton 2002: 8), US political unilateralism and flamboyant exhibition of power make many Greek local actors feel that the social contract as a

principle of Western post-enlightenment organisation is being constantly violated (Kirtsoglou 2006: 79).

Attempts to divide the world between ‘us’ and ‘them’, the differential standards employed in political decisions, and concepts such as that of international security and terrorism, are all seen by our informants as mere excuses that cast some nations ‘outside the protection of the rules of justice’ (Frey and Morris 1991: 9-10). Traditional allies of the Western Powers—like Greece—thus find themselves in the middle of critical political games where they have to formally support actions (like the war in Iraq) with which they otherwise disagree. The ideals of democracy, justice and the equality of the nations are then regarded as having been practically abandoned while Greece and other, less powerful allies of the US, are perceived as having been transformed from allies to satellite states in the imperium of the New World Order.

Apart from the violation of significant Western ideals of political organisation like consensus and equality, the local perception of US arrogance relates to the denigration of another important concept, that of allegiance. It does so in a rather complex manner. The Greeks have always imagined themselves as *allies* of the Western Powers and *not satellites* of Western Power. As many anthropologists have persuasively explained the Greek people collectively feel that classical Greek culture has been the cradle of Western civilisation (see among others, Herzfeld 1987). The Western World is seen therefore as a *natural* ally to Greece, because Greece, in the political consciousness of the indigenous actors, represents its very cultural heritage. Despite the undisputable fact, however, that Greek politics are allied to the West, many local actors in Greece do not feel equal members of the Western Powers. As Herzfeld has noted, they “seriously and frequently ask themselves if perhaps they now belong politically, economically and culturally to the Third World (1987: 3).

This is seen on behalf of the Greeks as another type of treason. Even if there is no equality in the world, even if the principles of Western political organisation proved to be a kind of ‘foundation myth’ (cf. Gellner 1995: 62), the Western Powers *ought* to treat the Greeks as their respectful ally in recognition of their cultural heritage and of what they had offered to the world. Therefore, even if we ultimately accept that we all live in an unjust world, many local Greek actors feel that Greece should not have to suffer the consequences of injustice because of its past, its adamant commitment to the West and the sacrifices the country has made in its modern history. It is in the context of the latter that Stefanidis’s argument can be constructively expanded. Greek nationalism and irredentism does inform the expectations of the Greek public, and the Greek version of anti-Americanism definitely relates to the fact that the US has not supported sufficiently Greek irredentist claims. However, what can help us fully appreciate Greek anti-American discourse is the expectation of many in Greece that US *ought to have supported* the Greek claims, and it has not.

Conclusion: Anti-Americanism as a context for political agency

The ignorance of the US citizens, the arrogance of US as a nation state, the betrayed allegiance of a more powerful ally, are all important dimensions of Greek anti-

American discourse. Precisely because of its resonance to locally accepted versions of history, and the related perceptions of historical and political causality, anti-Americanism is definitely an empowering discourse. It is empowering to those who use it, because of its populist appeal, but also because of its potential for exercising a certain degree of discursive agency. When local-level actors weave anti-American arguments, however conspiratorial or nationalist these might sound, they demonstrate their *capacity* to (at least) understand the truth, even when they cannot influence matters. They might be the ‘pariahs of the New World Order’, but through the pointed character of their anti-American critique, they demonstrate (at least) that they are not naïve, a-political, ‘young-Americans’ (*Amerikanakia*).

Our respondents in Greece acknowledge that they might not have real political power, but they strongly believe that they can understand how political power works. The power of understanding—the power of knowledge, as Foucault (1980) would have called it—compensates for the lack of ‘real’, ‘hands on’ power to influence political developments. It is from this circuitous, but easily realised position of argumentative authority that local actors in peripheral contexts elicit their anti-American rhetoric. Anti-Americanism in Greece, undeniably, and as Stefanidis (2007) has claimed, closely relates and reproduces Greek nationalist and irredentist claims. We have demonstrated in this article that it also has something important to reveal about the search for meaning and consistency in political life, the desire of peripheral actors to exercise some form of agency over the greater political processes that surround them. From the local point of view this agency is comforting, and to a significant degree empowering, even if its power and appeal is only discursive.

The modern Greek State is itself in many respects the by-product of a certain, specific historical development, and of the desire of the 19th century Great Powers for this state to exist. Its history and identity—based in the belief in an unbreakable continuity of classical and modern Greece—are themselves ideas cultivated first and foremost by European romanticism. In some respects Greece was led to believe that it belongs to the West and that it is the *natural* ally of the Western, Christian Great Powers. It is precisely this inconsistency that most of our informants struggle to apprehend. The West has always desired Greece to be its part, always acknowledged its affinity with the Greek past, but at the same time, has consistently denied Greece its equal political status, and an equal share in the privilege position of determining the world affairs.

In the context of the Greek anti-Americanist discourse, the inconsistency we have describe above is sometimes explained away through partially empathetic arguments which highlight the ‘ignorance’ and the misguided nature of the US political consciousness; other times through conspiracy-prone scenarios that blame capitalist forces or secret agencies; and some other times, it is discussed in terms of the Western Powers’ arrogance and their failure to uphold the principles of post-Enlightenment political organization. Yet a few times ‘treason’ and disappointment is perceived beyond the ideological level. The US and Europe have not just betrayed the ideals of the social contract, of transparency, equality and consensus. They went as far as betraying their own political and ideological allies, and ultimately, their own very culture that originates from the same classical ideals. Anti-Americanism, in this

respect, can be seen as a quest for meaning and consistency, as well as a context for engendering political agency. For, in a world without meaning and consistency the only power left to the local actor is that of understanding.

Notes

¹ See, Theodossopoulos & Brown (2000, 2003); Theodossopoulos (2004, 2007b); Kirtsoglou (2007); Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos (n.d.).

² The United States of America has a longer history as an independent nation state (founded in 1786) than Greece (1829), but for most Greeks the history of their nation starts in antiquity and it is considered to have followed an uninterrupted and continuous course since then. See, Herzfeld (1986), Just (1989), Stewart (1991), Theodossopoulos (2007a).

³ The post second World War legacy is still a dimension of lay analysis of Greek Anti-Americanism. Despite the fact that –as we will show- there is no such right-left wing distinction anymore, in the consciousness of many people –especially older informants- anti-Americanism is often portrayed as a predominantly Leftist discourse.

⁴ Although Stefanidis who provides us with this excellent quotation does not clarify what Psathas means by ‘north’, we can safely assume that the columnist is referring here to the northern borders of Greece (Bulgaria and Yugoslavia at the time), that were part of the Soviet block, from which NATO was supposed to protect the country.

⁵ See Stefanidis 110-123. Of course this line of thought is itself established in the belief that there is a continuous and unbreakable historical line between Classical and Modern Greece through the Byzantine Empire. For more about this particular thought see the work of several anthropologists, see Herzfeld (1987, 1997); Just (1989); Stewart (1994); Faubion (1993); Karakasidou (1997); Sutton (1998); Hirschon (2000); Yalouri (2001); Brown & Hamilakis (2003); Theodossopoulos (2007).

⁶ The importance of the past for the present and vice versa is not of course peculiar to the Greeks. Since we have referred to what the Greeks believe about the American role in the stay of the Greek Junta in power for seven years, we can also refer to Bill Clinton’s apology to the Greek public during his 2004 visit for US’s attitude towards the military regime. 1204 is similarly not a ghost that exists in Greek minds only. During the first ever meeting of the Roman Pope with a representative of the Greek church since the schism, Pope John-Paul the second apologized to the then archbishop of Greece Christodoulos “for all the occasions when the children of Catholic Church have sinned against their Orthodox brothers”. The apology alluded directly to the crusades.

⁷ The supporters of the communist party were also expressing similar opinions of course, but KKE (the Greek communist party) was not legal until 1974 and thus Papandreou’s statement was of particular value since it was coming from an ‘official’ politician and not just the representative of a discriminated and outlawed party.

⁸ This is of course not some pre-modern and archaic element, but an idea consistently cultivated in the context of the modern nation-state. For more on this issue, see Kirtsoglou (2006: 71-2).

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